

STEADY CLIMB FROM VERA CRUZ TO MEXICO CITY



The railroads leading from Vera Cruz to Mexico city have a steady climb all the way, and particularly is this increased in following the route of the narrow gauge line, which at Jalapa reaches an altitude of 8,924 feet. Mexico city is 7,875 feet above the sea level. The mountainous country lying between Vera Cruz and the capital is full of narrow passages and deep defiles which would be difficult to force in the face of a small but obstinate defending body. The southern or broad gauge route is the shorter one to the city of Mexico. From Tampico the capital can be reached by rail only by going inland to San Luis Potosi and thence south and eastward, altogether a very roundabout trip. The numerous bridges between the seacoast and the capital, any one of which could be easily destroyed or badly damaged, add potential difficulty to the advance of an invading army.

A Bowery Mission Where Russian Revolutionists Are Converted to Scientific Christianity

Rev. Julius F. Hecker, an Ordained Methodist Minister, Uses no Theological Terms in Convincing Class of Two Hundred Anarchists, Atheists and Nihilists

THE most intellectually progressive preacher in America is to be found in the Bowery. I was told. Incredulous, I went down to see. I saw. And now I believe it.

The bow ceilinged, yellow walled room was packed with Russian anarchists, atheists, socialists, nihilists—that is, they were of these beliefs until they were converted to scientific Christianity. Only a year or so ago they stood on their feet and shouted, "God is our greatest enemy! We hate him! Keep the kingdom of God to yourself and give us the earth!" Now they sat quietly in their seats with their overcoats on and leaned forward listening eagerly to an amazing sermon.

"The great problem of the last century," said the young preacher in Russian, as he thoughtfully turned over the leaves of a textbook on sociology on the pulpit before him, "was the origin of species, the organic ascent of beast and man. The problem of our age is the origin, the development and the destiny of man, psychological and social."

"This means that the crude materialism which during the last century was gradually capturing the people is doomed. The leaders of the coming generation will preach the necessity of regeneration and perfection of the motivating forces of life with scientific certainty."

"The whole sweep of cosmic, organic, psychic and social evolution shows that the rule of brute force had to yield to the superior forces of intelligence and sympathy. Social evolution proves that mutual aid and sympathetic, conscious cooperation make man fitter for survival than cutthroat competition, war and industrial exploitation."

On the other side of the door was the large hall of a slum rescue mission where unhappy human wastrels were being won to the paths of rectitude by the old machinery of the emotional gospel song, the heart breaking testimony and the penitents' bench. But here in the little side room were 200 Russian immigrants listening eagerly to a sociological exposition of Christianity. Not a word of the usual dogmatic insistence on penitence, the terrors of future damnation or the beatific allurements of a future life! Not a single theological term! And, greatest wonder of all, the pulpit from which these doctrines emanated is under the Methodist conference and the pastor is an ordained Methodist minister.

After the sermon, or more properly, lecture, the listeners gave their testimony, but it was very different from that being given in the neighboring hall. Here was no petty thievery to confess, no banal admissions of slavery to drink, no "failed to go to church" penitential

cries. These seekers after religious and scientific truth were, over 80 per cent. of them, revolutionists, political exiles or conspirators of one sort or another from that gloomy fatherland of misadventure and sorrow.

A quiet mannered, black haired young man rose to tell of the life which he had put behind him.

"I was a leader in the mutiny in the Black Sea in 1905," he explained, all bending forward to hear. "I was caught by the inquisitors and sentenced to be shot. Luckily I managed to slip behind a telegraph pole on the way to the prison and so escaped and came to this country. Life is hard here, but a great deal more quiet and satisfying than mutinying on the warships of the Czar."

This same young man I was told afterward is himself now preaching to his countrymen and is soon to be ordained. "The life I escaped from was no happier than mutinying," began another, as he rose and faced the roomful of serious countenances. "I was accused of taking part in the famous mail train robbery which occurred on the Polish border a few years ago."

"I was chauffeur of the automobile in which one of the robbers escaped with part of the 2,000,000 rubles. I was thrown into jail and made my escape with the greatest difficulty. Now it is difficult to persuade myself that I was ever involved in such desperate adventures. I certainly am glad to live the uneventful life of an American in New York, and do not hesitate to say that I got my first ideas of right and wrong here in this room."

And so the tales of dangers, chains, prison life, risks, anarchistic plots, fleeing from secret police and thrilling escapes ran on.

By the time the meeting was over, my mind had framed innumerable questions as to the inception of this interesting work and the personality of the man who was conducting it. I have seen and pitied religious and political fanaticism in Russia, but never had I expected to find its remedy in my own country. The pastor of this remarkable parish, the Rev. Julius F. Hecker, gave me the complete story over several glasses of Russian tea (the glass and the lemon make a world of difference!).

Mr. Hecker is of German-French parentage, was born in St. Petersburg, began school there, became a revolutionist, got his name on the wrong side of the police books, and came to America when he was 21. He took his A. B. degree at Baldwin Wallace College, Berea, Ohio; his B. D. degree at Drew Theological Seminary, and has just passed his doctorate examinations in sociology at Columbia University. He is only 32 years of age, has the deep,

set eyes of a thinker, preaches in Russian, German and English; understands French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew; is thoroughly Americanized in dress, and, as he talks, from time to time brushes his thick, wavy black hair back from his brow.

"How did this work begin?" I asked. "Well, you see," he replied, "I came to America to train myself to go back to Russia and help my comrades, but the time is not yet. So I looked about me here."

"I soon learned that after the last Russian revolution in 1905 the number of Russian Slav immigrants to this country began rapidly to increase. Some 60,000 were admitted last year alone. Of the non-Jewish type, in which I was interested, there are to-day some 70,000 in New York alone. Add to this the fact that most of them settled in the lower East Side, a locality from which

very superstitious, but more or less loyal to their church and Government; workingmen, fully class conscious, often revolutionists, escaped prisoners, atheists and anarchists; and finally, the self-styled intellectuals, who are in reality half baked university students, quasi-educated actors, Government officials, teachers and so forth.

"The educational standard of these men, however, is higher than of any other immigrant group. Of the 150 present at a recent meeting not one was illiterate, twelve had had a secondary school education, one was a graduate of a high school and one had a university education. Since immigrant literacy is almost 25 per cent., we may proudly claim to have the intellectual cream of the Russian colony."

"And men like these, you say, have taken kindly to Methodism?"

"Well, scarcely. When I faced my

audience for the first time, with the Bible in my hands, I was met with cries: 'Put it in the museum! We won't be bluffed by any religion! Never mind heaven! We want better pay!' With such a flock as that to shepherd you may readily see that no ordinary or traditional brand of Methodism would do. So I evolved a brand of my own."

"Russian revolutionary radicals, you see, seldom agree except in one thing, namely, that religion and the church are the greatest curses under which humanity ever suffered. When once at a large public gathering a speaker said that of all his many enemies God was his most hated and bitter foe his blasphemy was met by stormy applause."

"This almost incredible enmity to religion is the product of a spiritually decayed state Church and a despotic regime which exploits ignorance and superstition. Their bitter denunciations

Interprets Christian Truth as Given in the Bible by Logic and History and Sociology—Many Stories of Thrilling Escapes From Russia Told

who systematically and despairingly denied everything.

"I knew that their demands for proofs for evidence, for rational premises would be insatiable. Very well, I determined to prove and demonstrate beyond all cavil or possibility of denial."

"I was wondering how I should make a beginning when Tolstoy died in October, 1910. That gave me my opportunity. I secured a large hall and with several other speakers attempted to address the thousand or more men who gathered."

"When my turn came and it was seen from my Bible and my introductory words that I was a preacher I was hooted and jeered at and did little more than announce that I would lecture on topics of particular interest to them on the following Saturday evening in the little chapel of the Church of All Nations, 9 Second avenue."

"They came. They were, I sometimes think, the most critical audience a preacher ever faced. I discussed critically and fairly all the peculiarly modern doctrines of social salvation—socialism, anarchism, syndicalism and progressive Americanism. From a sociological point of view we studied the rise, development and decay of civilizations, inclusive of their religions, family life and morals. In short, we surveyed society as it has been and as it is, showing the causes of its good and its evil."

"I allowed ample opportunity for questions and objections. I let nothing go by which they did not understand. I never talked at them, but always with them. So we fought it out, point by point, hour by hour, often long past midnight."

"Despairing at times because I could not lay down a single premise or make a beginning anywhere with which they would agree, I would simply take their own doctrines, reduce them to absurdity and then begin all over again. I sometimes think that I learned and digested more ethics, biology and sociology in those definition making, dialectical bouts than I ever did in college."

"To these lectures I added evening classes in English, American history and civics. A reading room was opened and different gatherings of a social nature were held throughout the winter. Thus in time the opposition gave way to a more friendly sentiment, and I was able to begin my preaching service on Sunday afternoons. My first text was 'You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.'"

"The attendance at these latter services began to increase rapidly, until we have now twenty-five full members in the church, over sixty paying members in the brotherhood and a night school

of over one hundred pupils. All our meetings meet some definite, urgent need. I am not in favor of fitting out settlements with game rooms and amusement devices. Such things encourage intellectual drowsiness. I want to wake them up. The weekly attendance is from 500 to 600."

"In what way, then, does your interpretation of Christianity differ from the doctrines preached in the churches to-day?"

"The only type of Christianity that will convert, or, let us say, convince anarchists is what we may call a sociologized one. It is Christianity subjected to the severest logical and experimental tests that science offers. I had no use for my theology. I interpreted Christian truth as given in the Bible by logic and history and sociology."

"Take the idea of God. One day while I was talking in my little chapel a man in the audience called out, 'Yes, but how do you know there is a God?' I replied, 'I don't know there is a God; nobody knows whether there is a God or not.' That puzzled them and they cried out, 'What! he preaches Christianity and has no God!' Scandal!"

"I gave them plenty of time to ponder the matter, and then I said, 'I do not know that there is a God, but I believe that there is one.' They then objected to faith. Whereupon I showed them the scientific necessity of faith, giving it the scientist's designation of a working hypothesis. And this was the type of doctrine with which I made up a Methodist brotherhood out of God haters and bomb throwing politicians."

"How do you differentiate, then, between Christianity and sociology? Why not give over Christianity entirely and preach sociology?"

"That suggestion has come to me time and again from numbers of detractors among the socialists and anarchists whom as yet I have not been able to reach. Men have stood up in my meetings and accused me of clinging to religion simply because I got my bread and butter by preaching it. Delegations of socialists and others have visited me and urged me to give up my religion, promising me the full support of their organizations if I would talk under their banners of rebellion."

"No, I shall never do so. Sociology is not a substitute for religion, but rather an explanation and justification of it. The day of psychic and social evolution is at hand. Leaders of the people are needed, and these leaders must be men who see visions, they must believe heart and soul in the principle of some form of regeneration; they must be prophets in every sense of the word."



The audience of anarchists.



Rev. Julius F. Hecker.

120 Protestant churches have retreated in the last twenty years, though 200,000 people have been added to its population in that period, and you can see what an opportunity faced me.

"I didn't have to return to Russia to begin the great work of reform. Russia is coming to America, and the great intellectual revolution which some day is to shake Muscovy from ocean to ocean has already begun in this country. Russian history is being made right here in lower New York."

"But isn't it true that the Russian immigrant is recruited from the lowest stratum of the illiterate proletariat class?"

"By no means. The Slav Russians among whom I work are mainly of three kinds: peasants, half illiterate and